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ABSTRACT

A text is the locus of many intersecting processes, the origins, character, and operative principles of which should be the main focus of its discussion in a writing class. These processes can be classified into the four major components of the communicative act: the writer, the reader, the social conditions of communication, and the historical and rhetorical context. In terms of process, a text records the writer's decisions, but students need guidance in making these rhetorically, contextually motivated choices. Text analysis in a writing class should focus critical attention on systematic relationships, ordering principles, and schemata, while critical reading of a text should lead students to an awareness of the interpretive conditions that our community imposes on a text. Composition readers tend to ignore the "writing" of the text, or its working. A review of some popular composition readers in light of current discourse studies and text theory revealed that the majority do not reflect, except sporadically, recent advances in these fields and that they operate on static, nonrhetorical conceptions of the text and on aesthetic and normative assumptions about the role of sample readings in composition class. (SRT)

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# Readings for Writers: Composition Readers, Discourse Studies, and the Reading-Writing Connection.

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Readings for Writers: Composition Readers, Discourse Studies, and the Reading-Writing Connection

Since most writing classes make use of sample texts, either essays collected in a composition Reader, duplicated student papers, or other samples of writing, I want to concentrate in this paper on the general question: What is the best way to approach texts in a writing class?

I approached this question from two directions: 1. I reviewed current work in discourse theory, textlinguistics, and literary theory to find what it has to say about the nature of texts and discourse, and 2. I examined the approaches to texts taken by editors of 13 popular current composition Readers (see the Appendix for a complete list of Readers considered in the study). Specifically, I looked for answers to such questions as: What's the best way for a practicing writer to look at a text and what does a "critical" reading consist of? How do skills learned from critical reading be apply to writing? How do composition Readers differ and how to choose the "best" one? According to what criteria should one evaluate composition Readers? Most composition Readers claim to take the "process" approach and to "engage" students actively; many advertise special features, apparatuses, and appendices. But which of these features are most helpful in learning to write?

1. Functional versus static views of the text

To begin, let us consider what would be the most helpful way

to look at a written text for practicing writers. Since in a writing class we deal with composing and with rhetorical considerations, it would make sense to look at a text first in terms of the two processes which bring it about: (1) the composing process, that is, the writer's decisions and choices, and (2) the reading process, that is, the interplay of effects, relations, and decisions that constitute the reader's reconstruction and understanding of the text's "meaning."

The basic premise of my argument is that in order to begin discussing these processes, the text must be seen, if I may use an organic metaphor, as "alive," as in "motion." Students are often stymied in their attempts to discuss a text because it is dead for them; it is there, spread out, inert and cast in stone. This inertness of their own text hampers their ability to revise. They look at a text as people who rarely open the hoods of their cars look at engines: a mass of bolts, hoses going from somewhere to somewhere, undefined things sticking out here and there--a jungle of metal, plastic, and rubber. When their car malfunctions, they are reduced to staring helplessly at this construct. The first words of a skilled mechanic, on the other hand, are "Start her up!" It is only in action--fluids pumping from here to there, gas and air entering, exhaust coming out, the system living and breathing--that the "expert" can test it, try out hypotheses, connect and disconnect cables and hoses, block vents, poke and test. Similarly, for a writer reading, re-reading, revising, testing strategies and effects, the text should appear as dynamic, as functional, that is, as reflecting a

doing in language.

We find two functional definitions of the text in discourse theory. Arthur Applebee describes the text as "a semantic structure formed out of a continuous process of choice among interrelated sets of semantic options" (3). Robert DeBeaugrande sees the text as "an actual system, that is, a working system in which decisions and selections have been made such that the various occurences have some function(s) in contributing to the operations of the whole" (295).

Note, that this "functional" perspective applies to both writer and reader; the reader also makes interpretive decisions, formulating global and local predictions about what will follow next, recognizing generic forms and organizational schemata, tying together disparate elements of the text, and creating a coherent sense of the whole. The functional view insists on seeing the text, both as created and re-created, not as an object of aesthetic or other beholding, but as a locus of many intersecting processes. My major argument in this paper is that it is these processes--their origins, character, and operative principles--that should be the main focus of discussion of texts in a writing class.

These processes can be classified into four groups corresponding to the four major components of the communicative act: the writer, the reader, the social conditions of communication, and the historical and rhetorical context. First to be considered is the writer's composing process, governed on the one hand by the writer's purpose and on the other by the

awareness of effects on readers. Second, there are the processes which make up the reader's reception of the text: the reactions, predictions, connections, associations, and interpretations that form the reader's understanding of it. Third, there is the social environment that to a large extant determines both the reader's and the writer's interpretations, reactions, and attitudes. The social environment regulates and specifies the rules of interaction between the writer and the reader. In this sense, we may say that a text is not only a personal gesture, but also a social act. Fourth, and last, there is the largest historical and intertextual context in which the text operates. This context forms the rhetorical exigence in which the text comes into being as part of a discussion or as a response to events or to other texts. I am now going to discuss each of these perspectives in more detail.

2. The text and the composing process

Carl Frederiksen provides a useful formulation for looking at the text in terms of the process of its composition: "a text results from a series of communicative decisions" (67). From this perspective, then, we consider the text as a record of the writer's decisions governed by purpose and by desired effects.

The notion of "communicative strategy" is central to all communicative text theories. Schmidt defines "communicative strategy" as "a plan for the optional realization of communicative intentions, a plan which respects the objective and subjective elements and conditions involved in processes of communication and which determines the internal and external

structure of a text" (53). The verbal text on the page is the result of such communicative strategies. These strategies form a kind of "decisional grammar" of rhetorical choices made by the writer and the analysis focuses on major variables influencing the rhetorical choice in a text and on evidence of these decisions in the text.

The writer's decisions can be approached either in their "virtual" aspect in their "actual" aspect. A virtual system is the sum of all potential options available to the writer. An actual system is the specific system of only those options that were realized in the specific text. To discuss the text as an actual system is therefore to observe what the writer did and what effect was achieved on readers; while to discuss the text as a virtual system is to speculate about what else could have been done and how it would have changed our understanding of the text. The discussions of the virtual and actual aspects of choice are therefore complementary.

In spite of frequent references to "process" and "technique," it appears that few current composition Readers look at texts in terms of available options and rhetorical effects. Consider, for instance, how one popular composition Reader approaches its discussion of writing techniques in a text. The editors follow each of their selections with three sets of exercises: "The Writer's Technique," which appears to be an analysis of a single selected paragraph in terms of its "rhetorical mode"; "Paragraph Practice," a guided imitation of the paragraph in order to "show students that the best way they can support their ideas is

through extensive use of supporting details"; and "Essay Practice," a skeleton outline of the "model" text provided by the editors, which students have to fill in with their "ideas." It is hard to see how a mechanical filling in of, for instance, a "comparison-contrast" matrix with "ideas" stretched on such a Procrustean bed would teach students to make rhetorically-motivated decisions. There is no real context for choice here, no awareness of available options, and no rhetorical effects to be gained. And, as a pedagogical question, what exactly are "supporting details?" It is my experience that students know <u>that</u> they have to give "details" (they've been told that a thousand times); what they don't know is what counts as "support" or as a "detail," when and how much to give, and when there's enough. That is, what they need is guidance in making rhetorically-, contextually-motivated <u>choices</u>.

The editors of another well-known Reader follow Lewis Thomas's "The Technology of Medicine" with these questions:

Why does Thomas think that ...?

What does Thomas demonstrate about ...?

Both questions treat purpose as a static function of the text's "content," not of its social, communicative nature, in which "purpose" is dynamic: an intentional attitude directed at accomplishing a goal. This kind of analysis leads students to think un-rhetorically about their own writing; for instance, they often reply to our questions about their purposes by saying "I wrote this piece to describe my house." It would be better if they just said: "I wrote this because you asked me." At least

such an honest formulation includes the social situation and a personal relation, which are the basic rhetorical dimensions of a discursive act and which can become starting points for a rhetorical discussion (Who do you think I am? Why would I read this?).

In "Questions for Discussion" following Thomas's essay, the same editors ask: "How does Thomas define the word 'technology'?" The question is worded to invite a paraphrase. Instead, Thomas's definition could be approached in terms of writer's purposes in defining their terms and of available ways of doing so. Another question asks: "What is Thomas's attitude towards ...?" A more rhetorically-conscious wording migh draw attention to the effects that specific elements of the text have on readers' perceptions of writer's attitude.

The editors of another Reader ask the following two questions of Jacob Bronowski's essay "The Reach of Imagination":

--What function is given to the mind by the title metaphor of reaching?

--What is the significance of his /Bronowski's/ selecting these words?

The phrasing of the first question does not invite a discussion of the essay's title in the context of titles, their relation to the text, and their effects (for suggestive discussions of the role of titles in understanding and recalling discourse, see Bransford and Johnson; Dooling and Mullet; Kintsch; Kozminsky; and Bock). Nor does the second question invite a discussion of the effects of diction on readers' perceptions of salience, since

the word "significance" suggests thematic significance inherent in the text and not a rhetorical choice aimed at readers. By contrast, the editors of another popular Reader do suggest connections between "techniques" and purposes by asking questions like: "What techniques does X use to make the essay more understandable, enjoyable, interesting, etc?"

Looking at a multitude of "questions for analysis" in composition Readers, I noted how infrequently students are reminded of why it is useful (and therefore interesting) for them to answer these questions or to ingage with the text beyond its obvious propositional content, and of connections between this task and their own writing. Symptomatic in this respect are the following questions that the editors of a best-selling Reader ask of Edward T. Hall's essay "Proxemics in the Arab World":

--According to Hall, why ...?

--What does Hall mean by ...? (Why not at least "How do you understand Hall's assertion that ...?)

--What other examples can you find for the assertion that ...?

These questions suggest that the text simply "says" something in its verbal interstices through which the students search with a magnifying glass for the right answer. The students may legitimately wonder what they will learn about writing by finding somewhere in this verbal jungle what Hall says about x.

3. The text and the process of reading

In order to better appreciate the difference between looking at a text as simply saying something and looking at it in terms of its effects on readers let us reach to discourse theory and

text linguistics. What do they tell us about the processes of reading and understanding discourse?

One of the basic mechanisms of understanding connected discourse is the formation of predictions and matching of predicted patterns to the unfolding text. Readers form predictions, both local and global. Their predictions range from what proposition will follow next to what will be the structure and focus of the whole discourse. Rhetorical effects depend to an extent on raising expectations and then either matching or failing to match them. Consider, for instance, the structural predictions and subsequent mis-matches (and self-corrections, or reprocessing) involved when we read "once upon a...bicycle" or "a grief ago." In the latter, the syntactic prediction actually works backwards to reprocess the "meaning" arrived at through the initial prediction. In a similar manner, we formulate at the outset macrostructural predictions for the text's organization; such large-scale structural predictions guide our reading and, studies show, are of great help in the comprehension and retention of texualized information. Consider, for instance, what textual organization we expect following these two last sentences from the first paragraph of William Langer's "The Black Death": "In these days when the threat of the plague has been replaced by the threat of mass human extermination by even more rapid means, there has been a sharp renewal of interest in the history of the 14th-century calamity. With new perspective, students are investigating its manifold effects: demographic, economic, psychological, moral, and religious." Or, consider the

structural predictions which arise from this sentence which concludes the first paragraph of a student essay: "Cage's innovations over the past forty years have done no less than break down musical boundaries in place for centuries" (Scott Sumner, "Everything is Theater"). Predictably, Sumner's essay in organized chronologically, with each new section headed by a significant date in Cage's career during the last forty years.

Predictions function not only structurally--to organize our understanding of the following material--but also thematically, to tap into our memories and awaken associations, to arouse interest, and to focus our attention on the writer's intentions. Consider, for instance, the thematic predictions we make when we read these openings of well-known literary works: "Happy families are all alike. Every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way" (Tolstoy, Anna Karenina); "In Moulmein, in Lower Burma, I was hated by large numbers of people--the only time in my life that I've been important enough for that to happen to me" (George Orwell, "Shooting an Elephant"); or: "In the beginning God created Heaven and earth" (Genesis).

One way to sensitize practicing writers to these basic principles of creating coherent and readable text is to have them read successive elements of the sample text--or of their own texts--one at a time (I vary it from one word at a time to one sentence and on to one paragraph at a time), forming predictions for succeeding elements--both in microstructural terms (individual propositions) and macrostructural terms (organization of the whole text and its subdivisions)--and

watching their own processes of "meaning formation." This activity is related to the "temporal unfolding of meaning" theories of reading proposed by Stanley Fish and Wolfgang Iser.

4. Critical reading and critical thinking

Critical thinking is largely an awareness of our own processes of making meaning out of experience. Ann Berthoff defines "critical thinking" as "the capacity to see relationships methodically" (114). Texts are systematic structures defined by such relationships as parts to whole, beginnings to endings, ends to means, "if...then" structures (involved in any discussion of options and effects), and structures of the type "how X is like Y with respect to Z" (which is the formula underlying discussions of both coherence and figurative language). Both reading and writing are guided by methodical perceptions of structure and of relationships. Text linguists tell us that text processing involves essentially a systematic ordering of elements in four hierarchically related cognitive domains:

1) the domain of the general knowledge about the normal ordering of events in the world,
2) the domain of the general principles of ordering,
3) the domain of the general principles of ordering knowledge in discourse, and
4) the domain of the available schematic structures and rules (Kintch and Van Dijk).

Coherent text analysis in a writing class should focus critical attention on such systematic relationships, ordering principles, and schemata, all of which involve the notion of

"shaping," of design. Ann Berthoff argued, for instance, that composing is mainly as an activity of "forming," in which "what we chiefly need is a way of thinking about the sources of and the shaping of what we communicate" (85).

An important source of what we communicate is dialog or dialectic. Every expository text can be looked at in terms of its "dialectical" structuring. First, it advances a claim that by its very nature as claim situates itself in relation to other claims or counter-claims. In these terms, a claim can be seen as an answer to an implied question or as a counter-proposition to a stated somewhere else or implied. A text therefore unfolds through its dialog with its implied reader and with itself; it asserts, asks questions and answers them, presents and refutes counterarguments--it is, in a way, thinking on the fly. Sometimes, on the other hand, this inner textual dialectic is hidden from the reader; a text speaks authoritatively, yet the critical reader supplies the explicitly missing dialog and assumes the position of interlocutor.

Bennison Grey attempted to show that even the individual propositions in a text are dialectically related. The question-answer pair provides, according to Grey, the most natural link between assertions in unfolding discourse, revealing, at the same time, the communicative character of rhetorical choices. As an example, Grey considers the following pair of assertions:

1. Air pollution is now primarily a social rather than a scientific problem.
2. At the heart of every social problem lies the question of

responsibility (IX).

Sentence 2 does not seem at first to follow naturally after sentence 1. However, it seems perfectly natural as a response to one of the possible questions a reader might raise after the first assertion: "What, then, characterizes a social problem (as opposed to a scientific one)?" Thus, proposition 2 is made available to the writer as an option in response to a reader's question implied in proposition 1.

Berthoff's alternative term for the composing process is "interpretive paraphrase," which nicely summarizes what should probably be the best approach to a text for a practicing writer: to engage in a creative, interpretive dialog with the text. The ability to interrogate a text, to consciously observe its unfolding, and to project oneself into the position of interlocutor and participant in its dialog is what we mean, ideally, by critical reading, and such reading should be our ideal in a writing class. Fostering such reading is especially important if we encourage revision. Successful revision depends mostly on the writer's ability to get "untrapped" from the already produced text and to think in terms of its impact on a reader. This kind of assessment presuposes a familiarity (instinctive in most experienced writers) with the principles of text processing I have discussed here. These principles focus students' attention not only on the mechanisms through which meaning arises, but also on the essentially dialogic, interactive nature of written discourse.

As an example of a "dialogic" approach that engages students

with a sample text as critical readers and thinkers consider how one of the recent Readers deals with Jacob Bronowski's essay "The Reach of Imagination." The editors first ask the students to test Bronowski's own argument by applying to it the methods Bronowski advocates: "imagining" and "gedankenexperiment." Then, they invite the students to test Bronowski's argument logically, to relate it to their personal experience, to extend the argument to other issues with which they are familiar, and to make connections between the essay and other selections in the Reader. Next, the editors enter into a debate with Bronowski's text, inviting students to find further support for its argument and suggesting critical positions from which its premises my be questioned. Through a three-way debate: with Bronowski's text, with the compilers of the selections, and with their own experience and knowledge, the students are encouraged to use the rhetorical and logical devices of the text as tools for exploration, for thinking and simultaneously writing. For instance, following an extensive argument against Bronowski's position, the editors ask the students whether the debate seemed to suggest the need for a distinction between "imaginative" and "imaginary" (a distinction not made by Bronowski) and encourage the students to "put this distinction into /their/ own words" in writing. They follow by bringing in current political, social, and cultural issues and encouraging students to test the usefulness of the essay's argumentative strategies in exploring these issues. Although these activities do not explicitly address the principles of reading and understanding discourse,

they still engage the students in thinking actively about the text as something made, shaped, by a writer, something that can be used, tested, questioned, and most important of all, changed.

5. The text as social act

The text as a sort of "bargain" between a writer and reader has a social dimension. By saying "bargain," I am importing here the economic metaphor, so popular in contemporary critical theory. Within that metaphor, the "value" of the text and any of its elements, that is, their specific "meaning," is ultimately determined by the socially-constructed network of commonly held values, symbols, and interpretations. As Hasan reminds us, the text is "a social event whose primary mode of unfolding is linguistic" (229). Thus, we need to be aware that our understanding of texts has social basis, that reading "critically" is an "ethnolinguistic act," whose aim is, as Dell Hymes put it, "to discover and explicate the competence that enables members of a community to conduct and interpret speech" (52). Critical reading of a text should lead students to an awareness of the interpretive conditions which our community imposes on a text, of the "validity claims" that obtain in our culture, and of ways to express a legitimate intention and to establish an interpersonal relation in the text.

Jurgen Habermas claims, for instance, that a successful utterance must satisfy three validity claims: 1) it must be accepted by the participants as <u>true</u>, insofar as it represents something in the socially-constructed and accepted world; 2) it must be accepted as <u>truthful</u>, insofar as it expresses something

sincerely intended by the speaker; and 3) it must be accepted as right, insofar as it conforms to socially-recognized expectations for knowledge and discourse. Many of our students' problems in writing successfully arise from their lack of competence in fulfilling such validity claims and thus from their failure to produce acceptable conditions for understanding in discourse. Thus, their texts often fail not mainly on the linguistic or grammatical level or on the level of formal structures (such failures are often symptoms rather than causes), but they fail to achieve legitimate forms of interaction with the material world (object/world) and with the social-linguistic norms of signification that regulate the attainment and communication of shareable understanding.

6. The text and its contextual and intertextual dimensions

A discussion of the social conditions under which a text operates leads one to a consideration of its full rhetorical dimensions: contextuality, situationality, and intertextuality--staples of classical rhetorical theory. However, as the following two examples from composition Readers will show, not all provisions of "context" are equally effective. One of the more recent Readers prefaces George Orwell's "Politics and the English Language" with an extensive introduction, of which I quote only the final paragraph:

> After studying Orwell's essay, your class may want to subscribe to the Quarterly Review of Doublespeak, published by the National Council of Teachers of English. The review annually announces the "Orwell

> Award" for the best book exposing abuse of language, and the "Doublespeak Award," a mock prize for "misuses of language with pernicious social or political consequences." In 1982, two of the Doublespeak Awards were given to Lawrence A. Kudlow, chief economist of the Office of Management and Budget, "for creating the phrase 'revenue enhancement,' which was used by the Reagan administration instead of the phrase 'tax increase,' and to Secretary of the Interior, James Watt, "who said,'I never use the words Republicans and Democrats. It's liberals and Americans.'"

For contrast, compare the introduction to the same essay in another popular Reader:

> George Orwell (a pen name for Eric Blair, 1903-1950) was born in Mutihari, Bengal, where his father was employed with the Bengal civil service. He was brought to England at an early age for schooling (Eton), but rather than completing his education at the university, he served with the Indian imperial police in Burma (1922-1927).

There follows a brief bibliography of Orwell's major works with dates of publication, and then the final remark, which is the only direct reference to the essay at hand: "Orwell characterizes those aspects of our language which have allowed politicians to defend the indefensible." This kind of brief, purely biographical summary fails to expose the rhetorical, social dimensions of the text and may reinforce the students' view of

the text as an arbitrary object. The effectiveness of the "contextual" and intertextual approach to a text depends again on the extent to which we succeed in engaging the text in a dialog with its readers, its historical context, and with other texts.

7. Opening up the text

In looking at current composition Readers, I noticed the dominance of that time-honored feature: the "question for analysis." Why have questions become the consecrated method of looking at texts? Why questions, and not, for instance, explanations or descriptions of features of texts and principles of interaction? Looking at a text actively involves, as I have argued here, an awareness of (1) complex relationships that form the "web" of meaning and (2) of principles: social, psychological, cultural, etc., that make the text "work." The question as a form of inquiry seems suited best for interrogation of content and testing of comprehension. Perhaps the popularity of "questions for analysis" derives from older pedagogies that were less cognizant of the mechanisms of discourse and less concerned with "process," either of reading or writing.

If the ultimate purpose of textual analysis is to help students make students into critical readers who will continue to learn about writing through subsequent reading, who will have the ability and habit of looking not only at the "content" but also at how a text is put together, and to give students the tools to approach <u>their own writing</u> in rereading and revision, then we should aim at generalizing beyond particular texts to arrive at an increasingly sophisticated set of systematic principles for

critical reading. Only two composition Readers among the thirteen I have examined tried to develop such general strategies for approaching texts.

The editors of the first look for "joints" and "slicings" that reveal the "author's own analysis" of the text's design. Their aim is to make the text "yield itself up." To achieve that, the editors propose the following two-step procedure: (1) preliminary reading, and (2) re-reading and annotating for purpose, claim, reasons offered for claim, conclusions, reasons for conclusions, and evidence of organization. The editors identify two kinds of "reasons": facts, and general beliefs or principles. Next, the student reader has to label the major "stages" of the text (developing a kind of rhetorical plan or "schema" for the text) and underline the "connecting terms" (transitions and cohesive devices). The editors tell the student that "in a dialog of this kind /with the text/...we learn to read by learning to think and learn to think by learning to read." Then, the editors suggest the following set of focal points for text analysis:

1. Topic--the general area of interest and concern dealt with in the text.
2. Thesis--a specific proposition or hypothesis concerning the topic.
3. Definitions of crucial terms.
4. Evidence--facts, examples, statistics, analogies, etc.
5. Literary devices.
6. Assumptions.

7. Logical coherence
    a. by analysing the formal relationships between premises and conclusions.
    b. by testing the author's claims against one's own intuitions.
    c. by testing the author's claims against one's own knowledge, experience, and available evidence.
8. Overall structure--a reconstruction of the argument in terms of transition words, paragraphs, and main stages in the argument.

The second Reader offers a different procedure. First, the student is instructed to think of the essay's "external," non-textual features--to "read around" the essay. Then, the student reads, beginning with the headnote and reading straight through, noting any headings and sub-headings in the text, thinking about what "major strategy" is being employed, noting how content reflects the title, and watching for key words, repeated phrases, and for any "names." The goal of this first reading is to see the essay as a whole and to assess one's first impression: what was said, how it was said, what was the one's immediate response, and how much was fully clear. Then, the student reads the essay again, this time looking at "parts" not the whole, and thinking about the text in terms of the "process the writer went through." After the second reading and answering the questions following the text, the student has to write a short response that "sums up your feelings about what you have read. Talk back to the author."

This critical reading focuses on the following elements of the text:

1. Writer--who wrote the essay? (Age, sex, ethnic background, experience, qualifications, circumstances of publication, etc.).
2. Discourse type--what kind of essay is it? (Form, appropriateness to subject, constituent forms).
3. Purpose--why was it written? (General purpose, where and how stated, relationship of purpose to form).
4. Readers--to whom is it addressed? (Knowledge and experience assumed, anticipated attitude, expectations, difference between original audience and the "secondary" student audience).
5. Strategies--how the author makes it work? (Catching and holding attention, organization, strategies specific to particular forms, effects on readers and success in achieving purpose).

Such explicit sets of procedures for the examination of sample texts supply a rational, explicit, and teachable framework within which any more specific questions about a particular text can be raised. In fact, students may proceed to ask their own questions and to refine their reading strategies once they begin to grasp the rationale behind pragmatic rhetorical analysis. They may also apply these strategies to the reading of their peers' texts in writing workshops and to their own writing in revision. Such systematic, general analytic procedures may be based on the four functional perspectives on a

text and they may include the principles of reading and understanding discourse that have been outlined here.

8. Composition Readers and assumptions about reading and writing

There was a time when rhetorical Readers were simply collections of texts, with perhaps a few attached questions. In recent years, however, composition Readers have been fattening with additional material: introductions for students and teachers, exercises, commentaries, and analyses. How useful are all those materials?

The answer to this question depends on our assumptions about the role of textual analysis in a writing class and about the nature of language and verbal text. We may discover assumptions made by composition Readers not only from the way they approach individual texts, but also from the introductory essays, sample analyses, and teacher manuals which are offered.

Consider one popular Reader. This Reader opens with an introductory essay on "How to Read an Essay," followed by a sample analysis of Lewis Thomas's "On Smell." In their analysis, the editors move from the general directions for the student to consider the essay's title, writer, and circumstances of publication, to an analysis of the essay in terms of "Meaning and Purpose," "Writing Strategy," and "Language and Vocabulary." However, "Meaning and Purpose " turns out to be little more than looking for a "thesis" with no specific method beyond the remark that "in Thomas's opening paragraph, a careful reader might find two main ideas." This illustrates an unfortunate but common practice in composition Readers: the editors themselves do the

analysis, simply pointing out to the student reader the "thesis" and other elements of the essay, which is easier than explaining to the student how to do the analysis on her or his own. The analysis of "Writing Strategy" (the editors define "strategy"--somewhat enigmatically and perhaps tautologically--as "an inclusive name for whatever practices make for good writing"), turns out to be a standard injunction to consider the audience and to "illustrate each main idea, each general statement. Give examples galore...," along with a paragraph-long reminder to use transitions. "Transitions" are equated with "coherence" and no attempt is made here, or in any of the Readers I looked at, to make the student aware of the more sophisticted principles of managing the flow of the text (such as the given-new structure, the notions of topic-comment, predictions and their effects, or extended referential coherence). In the section on "Language and Vocabulary" the editors simply remind students of the existance of figures of speech (which are they define almost facetiously as "bits of colorful language not to be taken literally") and point out one simile in the sample text. They end with a reminder to the student to "become a frequent and judicious client" of the dictionary.

This rather cavalier approach to what for students are complex skills characterizes the approach of this Reader and of many others. One may suspect that the writers themselves are often not explicitly aware of how they write or read; instead, they explain away their complex skills with traditional, pre-theoretical catch-alls like "transitions" or "details." The

most puzzling instance of an un-rhetorical approach to a text occurs when the editors, in discusssing "cause and effect in a paragraph," tell the students to "note how the writer illustrates her generalizations with examples. The only unillustrated one is the statement that network TV exists for the purpose of selling things; and this seems an apparent truth we all know already." We might question, however, whether the omission of support in this instance doesn't conceal (or reveal) an assumption for which a rhetorical analysis ought to take the writer to task; the issue of "truth" is, under the circumstances, itself rhetorical, and to tell the students that such an assumption is, as "we all know," the "truth" seems rather to avoid basic rhetorical issues. What else are we trying to teach the students in a writing class if not that "truth" can be manufactured in subtle ways, that it is largely linguistically constructed, and that critical thinking, reading, and writing consist largely of the study, unmasking, and manipulation of such constructions?

A sample text is more than "additional" material, more than an "illustration" of techniques or a mode of discourse; it is never innocent. Textual analysis sets up the parameters within which all discursive practices in the class will take, or fail to take, place. That includes not only what students will "see" in any text, but what and how they will write and what stance they will assume in the world of discourse not only as writers but as humans steeped in a world that is increasingly discursive, increasingly textual. In his recent book, Robert Scholes argues that "textuality" ought to be the focus of English

instruction, since "what students need now is the kind of knowledge and skills that will enable them to make sense of their worlds, to determine their own interests, both individual and collective, to see through the manipulations of all sorts of texts in all sorts of media, and to express their own views in some appropriate manner" (15-16). "Textuality" can be loosely understood as the nature of texts, the nature which turns out to be largely semiotic. As such, textuality is concerned not only with linguistic codes but also with social and ideological factors and with communal and personal belief structures. Living with textuality and functioning within it necessitates continual interpretation of the various codes and messages contained in texts and in the world which surrounds us.

As interpretation, reading and "analysing" a text become much more than "understanding what it says." As Scholes put it, "if wisdom, or some less grandiose notion such as heightened awareness, is to be the end of our endeavours, we shall have to see it not as something transmitted from the text to the student but as something developed in the student by questioning the text" (14). Therefore, "what the student needs from the teacher is help in seeing discourse structures themselves in all their fullness and their power. The way to see the fish and to write the fish is first to see how one's discourse writes the fish." (ibid., 144)

Often, the Preface to a composition Reader or its Instructor's Manual will contain an explicit self-definition that will expose the editors' implicit or explicit assumptions about

the nature of textuality and the function and power of discourse. For instance, the editors of one popular Reader tell the student writer that a Reader can "stimulate you to reflect on and evaluate your own experiences and opinions and to think about how you can use them in your own writing." Such emphasis on "stimulation" often signals exclusive attention to content and a "static" representation of the text. These often go hand-in-hand with simplistic assumptions about the relation between reading and writing, as when the editors of another Reader suggest that "good expository writing will not only stimulate a student's thinking, but it will also inspire that student to produce successful college essays." Such an inspirational view of the connection between reading and writing appears questionable in view of the complexity of the skills involved in producing a text revealed by the research on composing.

Other Readers see their task as supplementing the work students do in grammar and rhetoric texts; they intend to supply the "what about" for writing, to be "the source of ideas for students--a means of stimulating their minds and memories, of unlocking their own imaginations." We have here a fairly widespread justification for reading in a writing class: "the freshmen reader may offer one of the few chances to ... meet the classics," that is, "provide examples of articulate men and women expressing significant ideas in good language." Such a rationale assumes that a writing course is "contentless" and thus presents an opportunity to smuggle some "ideas" or "good" literature into the curriculum. What is missing here, however,

is the attention to the "writing" of the text, to its working; the "ideas" and "good language" are like dried butterflies in a display case when divorced from the working of the text. Ideas can hardly (at least in a rhetoric class) be divorced from their context and the way they are expressed--which ultimately determine whether they appear "good" or not. Similarly, "good language" is an aestheticized, meaningless abstraction considered apart from situation, context, or audience which let us see what makes a specific instance of the use of language "good." Nor is a sample text just an example of techniques in mechanical relation to the writing done in class. It plays a vital part in creating a social and thus rhetorical context for writing. Approaches that implicitly promulgate static, aestheticised, and mechanical conceptions of textuality deprive student writers of authority in their discourse and preclude their genuine engagement with writing.

8. Conclusions

My review of a handful of popular composition Readers in light of current discourse studies and text theory revealed that the majority do not reflect, except sporadically, recent advances in discourse studies, reading, and textlinguistics. They operate on static, non-rhetorical conceptions of the text and on aesthetic and normative assumptions about the role of sample readings in a composition class, assumptions that, in spite of lip service to the composing "process" and the rhetorical and contextual aspects of written texts, are often critical equivalents of the "current-traditional" writing handbook. This

traditionalism of composition Readers takes the dual form of

1) a strongly grammatistic conception of exemplary writing qualities such as clarity and coherence, and
2) a mechanistic definition of the connection between writing and thinking without regard to the rhetorical and functional dimensions of "thinking" in writing and to the functional character of written texts.

These biases are reflected in the emphasis on questions as the predominating analytic tool for examination of sample texts and in the stress on the examination of "content" with little regard to the rhetorical, social determinants of meaning, to the creative position of the reader in the process of text reception, and thus to the connections between reading and writing as involving creation of socially shareable meaning.

A final word: When I presented the gist of this paper at the Conference for College Composition and Communication, a teacher in the audience asked me whether an ideal Reader, based on latest research in discourse studies, could exist. Perhaps not. Perhaps it is not possible for composition Readers to elaborate the kind of approach to their selections that I have outlined here. The Reader which I found to be most sound according to my criteria runs to an intimidating 706 pages. Perhaps composition Readers should return to being simply collections of texts with a minimal set of general guidelines for critical reading. And perhaps it is, after all, up to us, the teachers, to handle the texts in a way cognizant of our purposes as rhetoricians and consonant with research and theory in our field. My purpose was

not so much to suggest what composition Readers ought to be like; rather, I chose to point out disparities between the what they have traditionally offered and what they continue to offer in greater quantities and under different labels, and the progress made in relevant areas of research and theory. This research offers us, independently of any concern with composition Readers, suggestive and powerful ways of looking at the processes with which we deal as teachers of writing.

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## APPENDIX

The choice of composition Readers to examine for my study presented problems. Every major publisher provides at least two or more Readers, some of which are combined with a "rhetoric" and/or a handbook. Since the aim of my survey was to look at a range of composition Readers, I did not have to examine every Reader on the market. I considered, therefore, one (at the most two) Readers from most major publishers. I looked only at "pure" Readers, not combinations of Readers and rhetorics or handbooks. In cases where one publisher was represented by several Readers, I considered the one distinguished either by a prominent author or co-author (as was the case, for instance, when choosing between William Heffernan's The Harvest Reader and W. Ross Winterowd and Charlotte Preston's Themes and Variations, both from Harcourt Brace). All such selectional decisions are difficult, and in the end some publishers are represented in my sample by more than one text, while others (such as Oxford) are not represented at all, primarily owing to limitations in the scope of this study and my sense of the Reader's relative popularity among my colleagues. I am aware that I may have missed some valuable data; however, I suspect that my general observations would have remained fundamentally uneffacted. The following, then, are the composition Readers I examined in my survey:

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Burt, Forrest D., and E. Cleve Want. Invention and Design: A Rhetorical Reader. 4th ed. New York: Random House, 1985.

Eastman, Arthur M., at al. The Norton Reader. 5th ed. W.W. Norton, 1980.

Eschholz, Paul and Afred Rosa. Subject and Strategy. New York: St.Martin's Press, 1981.

Kennedy, X. J., and Dorothy M. Kennedy. The Bedford Reader. 2nd ed. New York: St.Martin's Press, 1985.

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